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Does Europeanisation matter? The Case of Slovenian Political Party Electoral Campaign for the European Union

Tomaž Deželan

Abstract: *This article is based on a comparative analysis of five major¹ Slovenian parliamentary political parties at the time of the elections of deputies to the European Parliament (EP). The electoral campaigns of individual national political parties were scrutinized, with a special consideration of organizational features and strategic activities linked to the dynamics of the European Union (EU). The essence of the study lies in the detection of changes in political party election activities brought about by the impact of EU processes. The EU's political, social and economic influence on the national political discourse through analysis of the EP electoral campaign structures and identities complements the more conventional approach to investigating the Europeanization of national political parties, with a conceptual framework based on Ladrech's (2001) attempt to embrace the Europeanization phenomenon. Consequently, the emphasis is on identifying programmatic and organizational changes, patterns of party competition and relations beyond the national party system. Party references to transnational interactions and networks, cooperation with foreign national and supra-national party structures or representatives, the organizational and power relations of electoral campaign teams, the relevance of EU issues and institutions' assessments and the perception of the pro and contra EU dimension therefore make up the core elements of this paper.*

Key words: *Europeanization; political parties; electoral campaign; European parliament elections*

Introduction

Europeanization is a concept widely (ab)used in contemporary political science debates and literature. The apparent *contradictio in terminis* (Lajh, 2003) derives from the absence of a common definition with the ability to “surpass the present trap of boundlessness. The importance of boundary formation is therefore an imperative task to avert the concept of Europeanization from escalating expansion” (Radaelli, 2003). In order for the concept to surpass the obstacle of becoming a “catch-all” term for various kinds of processes of transformations and adaptations at the (sub)national level (Grabbe and Lajh, 2003: 38), a number of helpful strategies have been constructed. One is the “negative definition” approach, which identifies the range of phenomena and processes that are not encompassed by the term. Another is to analyse the field

¹ The aforementioned criterion for the selection of political parties is based on the number of deputies in the National Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia in the 2000–2004 parliamentary term.

and put forward the empirical evidence of potential misconceptions and misuses of the concept to stimulate the accurate manner of prospective utilization. The exemplar instance is such endeavour is Featherstone's (2003: 5–6) classification of academic articles on Europeanization. This author elaborates that the general trends in literature reflect four typologies: where Europeanization is applied as an historical process; as a matter of cultural diffusion; a process of institutional adaptation and as the adaptation of policy and policy processes. The last two categories (minimalist interpretation) are closely linked with the operation of the European Union.

Of course there is a “top-down” and “bottom-up” perspective to Europeanization; nevertheless, if we remain with the former, Europeanization can be defined as “an incremental process re-orienting the direction and shape of politics to the degree that EU political and economic dynamics become part of the organizational logic of national politics and policy-making” (Ladrech, 1994). In a similar fashion, acknowledging the relevance of change in the logic of political behaviour, Radaelli (2003: 30) argues that the concept of Europeanization refers to “Processes of (a) construction, (b) diffusion, and (c) institutionalization of formal and informal rules, procedures, policy paradigms, styles, ‘ways of doing things’, and shared beliefs and norms which are first defined and consolidated in the making of EU public policy and politics and then incorporated in the logic of domestic discourse, identities, political structures, and public policies.” Europeanization may therefore be considered as a process by which individuals and organizational actors and institutions respond to the altered conditions generated by the development of the European Union (Ladrech, 2001: 4–5). Within this “top-down” perspective Boerzel and Risse (2000) distinguish three aspects in which the domestic impact of Europeanization can be analysed and the processes of domestic change traced: policies, politics and polity. The second primarily draws our attention with the question of “How the European structure impacts on the processes of political contestation and interest aggregation, in the member states?”, since we are interested in exploring the process of Europeanization in the field of political parties. According to Boerzel and Risse (*ibid.*: 3), a modest amount of attention has been devoted to the field of Europeanization of electoral and party politics; however we must bear in mind that most of this work has been done in recent years.

Two pivotal contributions in the aforementioned field – the Europeanization of political parties and party systems – should be pointed out. The first is Peter Mair's (2000) study of the impact of Europeanization on national party systems, their format and mechanics. The second key study is Robert Ladrech's (2001, 2002) attempt to put forward a framework for analysis of the Europeanization of political parties. While Mair (2000: 27) intentionally leaves out the analysis of the impact of Europe on individual domestic political parties, and concentrates on national party systems, the national political arena and the direct impact of Europe, Ladrech (2001) outlines five broad areas of investigation to show evidence of Europeanization in political parties and party activities. Four out of five the proposed areas of investigation serve also

as a general framework for the analysis in this study. Hence, programmatic change, organizational change, patterns of party competition and relations beyond the national party system are the four fundamental cornerstones of our analysis; while we intentionally omitted party-government relations, as the fifth of Ladrech's areas of investigation, due to insufficient data.

The rationale behind this paper is to re-evaluate existing research observations on Europeanization of political parties in Slovenia through a study of election campaign for the elections of deputies to the European Parliament 2004². We argue that the process of European elections³ confirms prior observations regarding Europeanization of Slovenian political parties, despite the specific nature of such elections. In the analysis we utilized data gathered from three rounds of interviews with representatives of five leading parliamentary political parties⁴, with the first interviews carried out around one month before the election day, the second round approximately one week before the elections, and the last round conducted after the elections. Additionally, the analysis investigates on a comparative basis the observations from the interviews. The EU-25 data was used, available through the author's involvement as the Slovene participant in the sixth research framework programme – "Citizens and governance in a knowledge-based society" – representing the Centre for Political Science Research of the Faculty of Social Sciences of the University of Ljubljana. This study was a specific targeted research project "The determinants of active civic participation at European and national level" coordinated by University College Dublin⁵. Somewhat a control variable for the investigation provided the data collected by performing analogous interviews with the party representatives in the case of national elections (elections of deputies to the National Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia), which were held on 3 October 2004⁶.

² Citizens of Slovenia and EU citizens with permanent residence in the country elected Slovenian deputies to the European Parliament for the first time on 13 June 2004. The voters decided from 13 lists of candidates, with the list of Liberal Democracy of Slovenia and the Democratic Party of Retired People of Slovenia forming the only joint list of parliamentary political parties. With electoral turnout reaching barely 28.35 percent, the surprising winner of the elections was the candidate list of New Slovenia – Christian People's Party, which managed to gain two of the seven available deputy posts. The lists of Liberal Democracy of Slovenia, the Democratic Party of Retired People of Slovenia and the Slovenian Democratic Party gained two seats each, while the remaining seat was won by the United List of Social Democrats. The list of the Slovenian People's Party can be characterized as the only evident defeated list among the major parliamentary political parties, and it did not gain a seat in the European Parliament.

³ The term is used as a synonym for the elections of deputies to the European Parliament and will be applied throughout the remainder of the paper.

⁴ Liberal Democracy of Slovenia (LDS), Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS), Social Democrats (SD) – at the time United list of Social Democrats (ZLSD), Slovenian People's Party (SLS) and New Slovenia – Christian People's Party (NSI).

⁵ Extensive insight into the presented research project is available at <http://www.ucd.ie/civictact/>.

⁶ Representatives of campaign teams of five major parliamentary political parties for national elections 2004 were interviewed in a single *post festum* round. The interviews were performed by Tomaž Deželan on behalf of the Centre for Political Science Research of the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana, with an identical questionnaire to that which was employed in the case of the three-round interviews regarding the European parliament elections.

This article continues with an evaluation of the research findings of several studies regarding the Europeanization of Slovenian political parties. Afterwards we present the analysis of the evidence of Europeanization of political parties in the case of European elections, according to Ladrech's four areas. The observed evidence is subsequently put in a comparative context, according to identical data from old/new member states, and "controlled" by the national elections records. The paper concludes with the comparison of our empirical research findings with the observations of previous studies and identifies potential incongruence between them.

Evidence of Europeanization of Slovenian political parties

As is generally the case in Europe, there is a limited amount of studies conducted in the field of Europeanization of political parties in Slovenia. Of the available research in the field we must above all mention Fink Hafner (1999), Fink Hafner and Krašovec (2006), Fink Hafner and Lajh (2003), Krašovec and Lajh (2004, 2007 – in print), Lajh and Krašovec (2004), and Krašovec, Lajh and Kustec Lipicer (2006). There are, however, certain dissimilarities in the observations of Europeanization process and political parties between the aforementioned authors, although these discrepancies materialize due to different frameworks of investigation and not in the perception of the process itself.

Fink Hafner and Krašovec (2006) distinguish between two periods in the observation of EU impact on the national party system. The researchers put forward pre-⁷ and post full EU membership periods, where in the first phase they do not observe any significant problems in the consolidation of democracy, EU-related cleavages in the national party arena, nor any direct EU-political pressures in relation to national party competition. The authors identify an "asymmetrical Europeanization effect", which denotes a certain degree of impact on party manifestos and changes in direct party organizational structures on the one hand, and no significant direct impacts on the format and mechanics of party competition on the other hand. In the light of the experience of the pre-full EU membership period and the substantial inauguration of the full EU membership period (since 2004) Fink Hafner and Krašovec (2006) put forward a synthesized view of the impact of Europe on political parties and party system. To begin with, with regard to the programmatic content, they observed slight modifications in political party programmes, which included Europe mainly as a positive reference. Concerning the organization of parties, the authors' state that there is only a marginal impact, since a very moderate organizational modification of the majority of the parties was carried out, usually by enhancing the role of the secretaries for international cooperation. Similar observations can be made about the format of the national party

⁷ Krašovec and Lajh (2007), on the other hand, identified three periods of the same process, where they divided the pre-full EU membership period in two stages: "the first steps towards joining the EU"; and the "pre-accession and negotiation period".

system, which was influenced only in an unimportant way. More precisely, only one clearly Eurosceptic political party was established, which remained in obscurity, and one minor populist parliamentary party preached “Eurorealist” rhetoric lacking in pro-EU sentiment in order to attract voters.

Regarding the topic of patterns of party competition, EU-related issues have been mostly marginalized in the pre-full EU membership period due to the special European agreement of the parliamentary political parties, except one. They agreed not to politicize European issues at home (Fink Hafner and Krašovec, 2006). After full membership parties EU-policy-related cleavages based on the domestic pattern of party divides began to emerge, the most prominent of which regarded the implementation of the Lisbon strategy (*ibid.*). The authors also point to the work of Slovenian MEPs, the majority of them being top rank party officials, in involving the European Parliamentary arena to influence national party system competition, mainly according to left-right and government-opposition axes. When talking about relations beyond the national party system, most of the Slovenian parliamentary political parties developed contacts and cooperation with or even integrated into EU-level party organizations. The aforementioned interactions principally materialized through the engagement of party staff in partisan networks and transnational forums or by recruitment of active individuals to EU appointive and elective offices (*ibid.*).

A glance at the Europeanization of Slovenian political parties from the viewpoint of the European election campaign

The fact that policies in the member states are increasingly made at the European level is likely to have consequences for societal interest formation, aggregation, and representation (Boerzel and Risse, 2000: 4). According to Gabel (2000: 52), European integration influences national politics through mass voting behaviour. The Europeanization of party politics, and in our case equally importantly electoral politics, are however topics which have received far less attention than they deserve. Boerzel and Risse (*ibid.*) therefore urge researchers to investigate the effects of European Union structures on the processes of political contestation in member states, which can also be done by examining the features of party contestation on European elections. Mair (2000) acknowledges the importance of the “B channel” as means of access to European Union decision-making, inevitably influencing national party equilibrium, although the degree of the impact has not yet reached significant levels. Mair (2000: 27), however, intentionally did not investigate the effects “that Europe has wrought on forms of inter-party competition within the European arena as such”. Hence, he consistently excluded modifications to national party systems that emerged only within the context of the European parliament elections, although he did not deny the importance of the elections.

Acknowledging these deliberations, we decided to analyse the European elections with the intention of evaluating the degree of Europeanization of parliamentary political

parties in this context. The election race in the European elections has in certain circumstances an important impact on national elections (Gabel, 2000) – the “first-order” arena. Thus, we decided to investigate various aspects of electoral campaigns for European elections of five major Slovenian parliamentary parties. As noted in the introduction, we employed the framework for analysis proposed by Ladrech (2001). Accordingly, we resume in that manner by presenting each area of the proposed framework in the Slovenian EP elections context.

Programmatic change

Ladrech (2001: 8) noted modifications in party programmes as part of the programmatic change area, as one of the most obvious and explicit examples of Europeanization. Of course, if we look at the party election programmes, since we are investigating the European elections campaign, the issue becomes somewhat intangible. Naturally, EU-related topics will prevail according to the type of elections, or as pointed out by Mair (2000: 43) “European elections should be about European politics and the questions of Europe itself”.

As was predicted, EU issues played an important part in the election programmes of individual parties. Kustec Lipicer (2005) acknowledges that the degree of EU level references in party election programmes outnumbers the national level. According to the results presented by the aforementioned author, around 60 percent of all identifiable references to either level were concentrated on the EU level. (United List of Social democrats⁸ demonstrated incredibly around 90 percent of all references focused on EU level. Nevertheless, the high degree of references to the EU level in the election programmes proved to be irrelevant since the party representatives left out EU issues when pointing out the most important issues in the campaign. According to the results of the interviews, only one out of five investigated parties said that at least one EU issue is one of the three most important for its campaign. When we look at the cross-national data (Table 1) we can see that the focus on national issues prevails, which Fink Hafner and Krašovec (2006) term the “nationalization of debated issues”. In addition, the authors also observe that the mass media played an important part in “derailing” the issues flowing from the EU to the domestic level. Semetko, De Vreese and Peter (2000) also perceived a similar pivotal role of the mass media with having the “role of editorial gatekeeping”. All in all, we can say with a substantial amount of confidence that references to EU issues decrease with the importance of a topic for an individual party.

⁸ The party changed its name from United List of Social Democrats (ZLSD) to Social Democrats (SD).

Table 1: Focus on European vs. national issues by type of member states

			Focus on European vs.		Total
			national	european	
Old or new member state	old member state (EU 15)	% within old or new member state % of Total	61,7 %	38,3 %	100,0 %
	new member state (EU 25)	% within old or new member state % of Total	37,4 %	23,2 %	60,6 %
Total			66,7 %	33,3 %	100,0
			26,3 %	13,1 %	39,4 %
		% within old or new member state % of Total	63,6 %	36,4 %	100,0 %
			63,6 %	36,4 %	100,0 %

Raw data source: Bicchi (2006)

In addition to modifications in party programmes, the improved policy expertise among party officials, in our case election campaign team members, also provides a measure of Europeanization of political parties in terms of programmatic change (Ladrech, 2001: 8). Around 40 percent of campaign team members of the investigated parties showed experience of the EU issues in their parties prior to the campaign. Ludicrously, the unanticipated winning team had the lowest share, with only 10 percent. Additionally, 15–20 percent of campaign team members had experience with EU bureaucracy or national administration in EU matters in three cases, while the other two parties did not act with such personnel. The education of team members about the EU also proved to be reasonably high, reaching around 35 percent.

The integration of the EU dimension in references to domestic policy and through references to cooperation with transnational organizations were also expected to be supplementary indicators of Europeanization in the programmatic change area. In the case of the former, four out of five investigated parties integrated the EU dimension by referring to domestic policy when pointing out one of three most important issues, which is in accordance with the observations of Fink Hafner and Krašovec (2006). The latter indicator – references to transnational cooperation, demonstrated a somewhat diverse attitude towards the subject. Only three out of five parties referred to the EU by using its symbols on banners as well as using the logo of a European party federation or an EP party group. Surprisingly, only one party referred to a European party federation or EP party group by using their logos on banners. In this respect, the level of referrals decline compared to the EU accession referendum (Deželan, 2004), which indicates the reluctance of parties to Europeanize increasingly.

Organizational change

When talking about organizational change Ladrech (2001: 9) clearly stated that explicit statutory change in parties may not be evident, although change in practices

and power relations may occur. Minor organizational modifications should nonetheless be visible, which would indicate the pattern of change. In fact, a number of authors (Fink Hafner and Krašovec 2006; Lajh and Krašovec, 2004; Krašovec and Lajh, 2007) confirm such speculation, since they observe enhanced roles of international cooperation secretaries and the inclusion of formal definition of relations between the party and its MEPs in some cases.

In our case, we attempted to identify organizational changes in the election campaign team structure. To perform such tasks we compared the data on campaign teams' organizational structure in the European elections with the data gathered for the same category in the case of national elections⁹ in 2004. The comparison we carried out demonstrated that party executive members are the most common team members in all five investigated parties. The situation is exactly the same for the profiles of campaign teams in the case of national elections. Members of the campaign team comprised senior MPS in three out of five interviewed parties, while in the case of national elections this situation applied in two of the five parties. The same ratios also apply to the inclusion of external consultants in the campaign team. When we look at the size of campaign teams for the national and European elections we observe no considerable difference, with the exception of one political party. Additionally, the average age of team members in national elections and European elections per individual political party does not differ significantly.

The observed information indicates that there is no conclusive difference when comparing campaign team structures for national elections and European elections. The degree of contrast is far higher between political parties regarding the same type of elections than between parties when looking at the European and national elections. Although we were able to observe certain attributes of campaign teams that would indicate a certain degree of Europeanization in the case of programmatic change, we cannot make the same assumption for the organizational change area. We were able to identify the participation of former EP observers in the campaign team; many of them also future MEPs, but they were primarily performing the role of party executive members or senior MPs. The comparison of the campaign teams for two arenas therefore added additional stone to the mosaic for the statement that political parties and party systems are "impervious to change" (Mair, 2000).

Patterns of party competition

Although Mair (2000: 28) believes that "the absence of a genuine European party system serves to inhibit any restructuring of domestic party competition that might result from competition at the European level", Ladrech (2001: 10) points out that voters may be opportunistically targeted by the fact that the EU becomes politicized in

⁹ Elections of deputies to the National Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia.

national politics. The EU increasingly becomes an important factor for party management since several parties may focus their strategy on capitalizing on EU issues and potential divides these issues generate.

As we mentioned before there is a high level of convergence between major parliamentary parties regarding EU issues, and this was particularly so in the past. The period before the accession to the EU was tagged with the signing of the already mentioned European Agreement on Cooperation between parties. Since 2004, however, excluding certain strategic goals of Slovenian politics (e.g. adoption of the single European currency), EU issues became more strongly politicized than before. This was evident in the debate over rapid ratification of the treaty establishing a constitution for Europe and certain other instances. The lack of clear conflict regarding the EU and the absence of “domestication” of EU issues that could clearly disturb the national political party equilibrium is somewhat consistent with the observation that the EU “hollows out” competition among parties with governing aspirations since government policy manoeuvrability is constrained (Mair, 2000). All five investigated parties had and still have governing aspirations and additionally participated in at least one of the governments of Slovenia in the period of independence. Hence, the aforementioned chain of events is somehow understandable. Nevertheless, several parties recognised the EU related divide in the case of European elections. A number of parties identified the EPP¹⁰ members versus non-EPP members conflict. Three of the five major parliamentary political parties are the members of a European-level party mentioned above. One major party also recognized the conflict national sovereignty versus EU-level decision-making as an important divide in investigated European elections. In addition, four out of five investigated parliamentary political parties “nationalized” certain EU issues as important points of campaign in order to capitalize versus the opposition, by generating the potential divide and thus attracting potential new voters.

When we look at the type of conflicts that prevailed in the European election campaign across member states (Table 2) we are able to identify similar characteristics to those of Slovenia. The dominant conflict dimension in the examined elections across member states was left versus right, although somewhat more evident in the old member states (EU 15). The conflict between national sovereignty versus EU-level decision-making was reflected as the dominant conflict in individual political parties in around one-fifth of cases, without a considerable difference between old and new member states. However, the data illustrates a large number of other conflict dimensions, which dominated the elections in the eyes of certain parties. In the Slovenian case this dimension was centred on EPP membership. All things considered, we have to point out that the share of “other” issues is considerably higher in the case of new member states, which is probably the consequence of “inexperience” in the field of European elections, where parties had to explore completely new grounds.

¹⁰ European People’s Party.

Table 2: Dominant conflict in the campaign by type of member states

		which conflict dimension do you think was the most important in the campaign as a			Total
		left vs. right	nat. sov. vs. EU decis.-making	Other dimension	
Total	old member state (EU 15)	39,1 %	17,2 %	43,8 %	100,0 %
	new member state (EU 25)	20,5 %	20,5 %	59,0 %	100,0 %
		32,0 %	18,4 %	49,5 %	100,0 %

Raw data source: Bicchi (2006)

Relations beyond the national party system

The process of Europeanization is probably the most evident to the voter when looking at the transnational interactions of individual national or local political parties with an international or supranational fashion. Party relations beyond the national party system may result in “new perspectives on transnational cooperation with parties from other EU member states to the extent that new organizational and programmatic activities are promoted” (Ladrech, 2001: 11). Slovenian major parliamentary political parties have all reached the level of integration into EU-level party organizations in Niedermayer’s terms, most frequently by engagement of party personnel in partisan networks or extra-national forums, and by recruitment of active party members to EU appointive and elective offices (Fink Hafner and Krašovec, 2006).

In the context of the European election campaign, according to the performed interviews among major Slovenian parties, all the investigated parliamentary parties actively cooperated with parties in other member states. In this respect the data provided by Bicchi (2006) (Table 3) reflect that Slovenian parliamentary political parties demonstrated a higher degree of cooperation with parties in other member states than was the EU average (76 percent). Interestingly, the degree of such cooperation of political parties is higher in new member states than in the old, and is inevitably also due to the desire to overcome the “immaturity” regarding European elections with the experience of old member state correspondents.

Table 3: Transnational cooperation by type of member states

	Active cooperation with			coordination and support of EP group	participation of foreign politician
	parties in other member states	parties of the same EP group	transnational/ European party		
old member states (EU 15)	73,9 %	74,6 %	53,8 %	55,4 %	69,1 %
new member states (EU 25)	80,5 %	78,0 %	56,0 %	75,7 %	56,1 %
EU average	76,4 %	75,9 %	54,5 %	62,7 %	64,2 %

Raw data source: Bicchi (2006)

Four out of five Slovenian investigated parties actively cooperated with parties of the same EP party group. All five parties have had former EP observers and therefore established some ground for future cooperation. The only party that intentionally rejected the option of cooperation with parties of the same EP group regarding European elections was Liberal Democracy of Slovenia, the main governmental party at the time. Across member states, the average of parties cooperating with other parties of the same EP group was somewhat similar to the Slovenian case, without major differences between old and new member states.

The same number of Slovenian investigated parliamentary political parties also actively cooperated with their corresponding transnational party federation/Europarty regarding European elections. Again, only Liberal democracy of Slovenia refused to cooperate with its transnational party federation, while all the other parties sought to gain any kind of additional advantage in this respect. When we look at the European average provided by data gathered from interviews across member states (Table 3), we are able to observe that major Slovenian political parties demonstrate a far greater degree of cooperation with transnational party federations than their European counterparts. On the other hand, there seems to be no significant difference between old and new parties across member states. A similar occurrence is seen in the case of contributions to the EP party group in terms of coordination of and support for the campaign. Four out of five Slovenian parties intended that their corresponding EP party group would contribute to their European elections campaign. Once again, Liberal Democracy of Slovenia did not plan such contributions and proved to be the most reluctant to cooperate beyond the national party system. The degree of contribution of EP party groups to their corresponding national political parties in the new member states proved to be similar to that of Slovenia, while across old member states parties were somewhat less likely to contribute (55 percent). On the other hand, when considering the participation of foreign politician as part of the European elections campaign the parties from older member states demonstrated much higher average. Sixty-nine percent of investigated parties from older member states planned a participation of foreign politician, while the new member states' average was considerably lower (56 percent). Slovenian parliamentary political parties were no exception in this respect, since three out of five planned the participation of a foreign politician in their campaign.

Overall, when considering relations beyond the national political system, we can say that major Slovenian parliamentary political parties reflect a significant degree of cooperation with their European national and supranational counterparts. Comparatively speaking, Slovenian parties demonstrate a higher degree of cooperation than national political parties across the EU member states (Table 3). This proves to be significantly higher in the case of active cooperation with European party federations and EP party groups, which in effect could indicate a potentially higher degree of influence of EU-level arena on national political parties and party systems. Therefore, when taking into account the aspect of relations beyond national party system, according

to the organization of activities for the European elections campaign, Slovenian political parties provided the impression of being somewhat more Europeanized than their national counterparts across member states.

Conclusion

In order to encompass entire status quo regarding the Europeanization of Slovenian parliamentary political parties in the context of European elections campaign we have to consider the “global” – holistic view of the presented areas of investigation. Taking programmatic change area into consideration, we can say that Slovenian parliamentary political parties demonstrated very diverse practices. This was the integration of the EU dimension into references to domestic policies and through references to transnational organizations, where mainly opposition parties adopted the strategy of putting forward those attributes compared to the governmental ones. When looking at the degree of EU-level references in the election programmes they reach quite an enviable level (60 percent), however when adding the importance to the equation the true image begins to emerge. To be precise, only one major political party recognized the EU issue to be one of the most important ones for its, campaign therefore confirming the assumptions that EU issues play only minor role also in the race for the EP arena.

As far as the organizational change area is concerned, we observed no indication of possible effects of Europe on individual political parties. By this we mean that the organizational differences between election campaign teams for two types of elections within individual political parties appeared to be minor and completely inconclusive. Such an observation has two consequences: European elections do not seem to be as “second-order” in this respect as predicted; and parties – campaign team structures – appear to be impervious to change. The patterns of party competition area confirmed fairly genuine and favourable attitude of Slovenian political parties and electorate towards Europe. However, despite the high degree of convergence, the prospect of a new pattern of party competition has been identified, i.e. political parties identified a new category of divide between parties, which originates in EU-level politics. EPP members versus non-EPP members divide promises to have some amount of potential since the new Slovenian mainly right-wing government is assembled out of three EPP members, which are also the three largest governmental parties. Regarding relations beyond the national party system, Slovenian parliamentary political parties reflect a high intensity of interaction. In this area, parties seem to be very open to cooperation and integration into various transnational party networks. This was evident from the arrangement of election activities in relation to other European national or supranational structures.

In an attempt to answer the proposed research question in the introduction we may state that the process of European elections mainly confirms the prior observations regarding Europeanization of Slovenian political parties, despite the specific nature of such elections. Regarding the programmatic content we indicated a shift towards

Europe, which was expected due to the nature of elections, but the concrete shift was marginal as is the case in other studies (Fink Hafner and Krašovec, 2006; Krašovec and Lajh, 2007). Similar observation goes for the party competition, which is not shaken by Europe, although there is a potentially new conflict as was anticipated by others (ibid.) in the shape of new government versus opposition cleavages. Overall, acknowledging the limitations of our analysis of European elections campaign, we have to state that in general Slovenian political parties do not exert a substantial amount of change due to European integration, despite demonstrating notable degrees of Europeanization regarding certain aspects of analysis.

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